



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
299 Foam Street
Monterey, California 93940

November 14, 2005

Ms. Cathy Bleier
Deputy Assistant Secretary
California Resources Agency
1416 Ninth Street, Suite 1311
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Comments on California State Agency Watershed Management Strategic Plan

Dear Ms. Bleier:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the State of California Agency Watershed Management Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) presented to the California Biodiversity Council. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries manages four marine sanctuaries along the coast of California; Channel Islands, Monterey Bay, Gulf of the Farallones, and Cordell Bank. Together these areas encompass some of the most diverse and biologically productive marine areas in California. The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary represents all of these sanctuaries as a member of the California Biodiversity Council.

The work to protect and preserve the national marine sanctuaries off the coast of California is directly dependent on maintaining progressive and active watershed management in the drainages emptying into the coastal areas of California. The documented impacts of nonpoint source runoff to the marine environment, invasive species introductions, and wetland and nearshore habitat loss makes the connection between watershed and marine health obvious. The ocean is truly the ultimate receiver of all watershed benefits and impacts.

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is supportive of the State's continued development and investment in watershed management. The proposed Strategic Plan provides a method to organize state agency efforts in progressing watershed management initiatives with regards to governance and management, technical and scientific information, regulatory coordination, funding and investment, and project level coordination, local involvement and stewardship. The Strategic Plan could be improved by being more inclusive of locally-based watershed planning and management efforts, clearly defining a scientific approach to managing and monitoring watershed health, and by acknowledging potential regional partnerships with entities such as the California State Ocean Protection Council and the federal marine sanctuaries.



Support Locally-Based Watershed Efforts

Work completed through the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Water Quality Protection Program (WQPP) over the last 10 years demonstrates the success that locally-based watershed management efforts can have. The WQPP involves over 20 partners in developing plans, projects, and education and training about watershed management issues such as urban runoff, agricultural practices and runoff, and beach and wetland contamination in an effort to protect the marine sanctuary, its habitats and sensitive species. The program relies extensively on local partners such as cities and counties, resource conservation districts, and academic institutions to implement projects, monitor effectiveness, and identify priorities, while providing integration and coordination throughout the region. The WQPP is currently being expanded to other sanctuaries on the west coast. The State Strategic Plan should identify opportunities to partner with the WQPP and other regional and local watershed efforts.

Support Watershed Science

California has benefited from voter-supported bonds passed over the last several years, which have infused funds for watershed planning, project implementation and to some extent monitoring. Yet, there is still no systematic method to evaluate watershed health from an ecosystem perspective and California agencies have continued to struggle with integrating science and management in order to provide set of indicators for watershed health. This shortcoming will over time delay the progress that may be achieved in improving the State's watersheds. The State should consider investing in a statewide watershed science effort in the near term to progress this need.

Regional Integration

Watershed management in California must by its nature address a complex array of issues including water quality, water supply, endangered species, habitat conservation, and human health and public safety. An integrated strategy will need to address all of these issues. The integrated water plans initiated through Proposition 50 may be a good first step in accomplishing this conceptual change in how California views watershed management. Accordingly, the Strategic Plan would benefit from a description of goals and objectives for statewide watershed management. This definition may help to progress involvement with broader regional efforts that may share resource management needs and priorities. Without a set of goals and objectives associated with the State's strategy, it will be difficult to integrate potential partners and regional initiatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the California State Agency Watershed Management Strategic Plan. The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and its four California sanctuaries look forward to working with the State of California on furthering watershed management in California. Donna Meyers is our West Coast Regional Water Quality Coordinator and can be reached at (831)-420-1609 regarding our comments.

Sincerely,



WILLIAM J. DOUROS
Superintendent